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ABSTRACT

Assessed were the attitudes toward children of 246 college freshmen. A shortened version of the Situational Attitude Scale-Adults/Children (SAS-A/C) was used to obtain indications of subjects' attitudes toward five hypothetical situations representing levels of social distance. The situations were: (1) having a person as a houseguest for a week; (2) renting a room to someone; (3) having a person live in the adjacent apartment; (4) having dinner in a nice restaurant with another person sitting nearby; and (5) sitting next to a person on an airplane flying non-stop from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco. Two forms of the SAS-A/C were used. Whereas the control form did not designate the ages of the participants in the situation, the experimental form indicated ages by including a child or children under the age of 7 years. Findings indicated that students tended to react more negatively to the situations when children under the age of seven were included. Few differences by sex or the social distance involved in the situations were found. Implications for the education and development of young adults and the ways in which they may acquire prejudiced attitudes toward young children are discussed. Four pages of references conclude the report. (RH)

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ATTITUDES OF YOUNG ADULTS TOWARD CHILDREN

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SUMMARY

Children hold a special place in society. They are lavished with care, but are also the targets of many forms of discrimination. This study assessed the attitudes toward children of 246 freshmen entering the University of Maryland, College Park, using the Situational Attitude Scale - Adults/Children (SAS-A/C). Multivariate analyses of variance (sex by form) indicated that students tended to react more negatively to a variety of personal and social situations when children under the age of seven were included in those situations. There were few differences by sex or the social distance involved in the situations. Implications for the education and development of young adults, and the ways in which they may have learned such prejudice are discussed.

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Children hold a special place in society. They are lavished with care, admired, and spoiled. Millions of dollars are spent each year on toys and games to entertain them. There are more childrearing books on the market today than ever before, reflecting our concern for the physical and mental well-being of our children (Klausner, 1968). Children are a cherished group: it seems almost impossible to think that children may be subject to the same stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination as any other group. And yet, children are restricted from participating in the very decisions that affect their personal, social, and economic lives (Goodman, 1960). Formal laws, as well as the informal rules and traditions of the community and the family all seek to restrict the autonomy of children. Holt (1974) has noted that children are banned from at least one fourth of all rental housing as well as a variety of other forms of residential facilities. According to the Children's Defense Fund (1983), children were among the first to feel the impact of recent federal budget cuts. Even more tragic is the fact that millions of children are the victims of child abuse every year (Gelles, 1979). Such phenomena have led to the creation of forces such as the child advocacy movement (Margolin, 1978), yet little

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scientific research has been attempted to understand the antecedents of such behavior.

The literature contains research on prejudicial attitudes toward a number of identified groups including blacks (e.g., Minatoya, Sedlacek, & Brooks, 1984), women (e.g., Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1983), and the disabled (e.g., Stovall & Sedlacek, 1983). In recent years, age has become a category for consideration in this body of literature. In 1971, McTaVish presented a review of the literature on perceptions of old people. According to his findings, old people are generally viewed as ill, tired, mentally slower, not sexual, forgetful, withdrawn, unproductive, grouchy and defensive. Research has also shown an age bias among college students toward older students (Peabody & Sedlacek, 1982), and of educational and college student personnel professionals toward older adults (Cello, Sedlacek, & Schlossberg, 1977). Riley, Johnson and Foner (1972) have suggested that a cohort-centrism may exist and that individuals express negative attitudes toward others of different age groups. If this is the case, such negative attitudes may also extend toward children. There are two good reasons to study (negative) attitudes toward children. First, research has not yet established whether or not such prejudicial attitudes and negative affects actually do

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exist. An exploration and acknowledgement of these attitudes may help us comprehend what currently appears to be arbitrary discrimination toward children. Second, research shows that attitudes toward an individual or group can at least predict the overall pattern of behavior toward that individual or group. Racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice have historically resulted in a variety of discriminatory actions ranging from avoidance and exclusion to outright violence. Ashmore's (1970) definition of a minority group states: "The key point about a minority group is that it is in a subordinate position with regard to status and power" (p.250). Children are a minority group by this definition and may be subject to the same negative cognitions, affects and discriminatory behaviors as other groups. Attitudes are a good place to begin to explore this pattern.

As was stated earlier, very little research has actually been done on the attitudes of adults toward children. What little research exists, has usually focused on specific adult-child interactions such as attitudes toward child rearing (e.g. Cohen & Eiduson, 1973), attitudes of teachers toward their students (e.g. Khan & Weiss, 1973), and attitudes of the elderly toward children (e.g. Cryns & Monk, 1972; Higgins & Faunce, 1977; Seefeldt & Jantz, 1979). A

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more general study was conducted by Rogers and Wrightsman (1978) in which they developed scales to measure a respondent's orientation toward children's rights. The scales contained two polar ends: nurturance (giving the child what you believe is good for him/her) and self-determination (allowing the child to make his/her own decisions). The scales were administered to high school juniors and seniors, undergraduate college students, and adults in continuing education programs. In all cases, respondents were more likely to favor the nurturant poles of the scales at the expense of the child's self-determination. Bohrnstedt, Freeman and Smith (1981) conducted a more thorough study of adult attitudes toward children's autonomy. The study included 1,002 adults responding to vignettes on parent-child conflict. Their results indicated that an individual is more likely to take the side of the child in a conflict if the respondent is young, well-educated, has no religious identification or has a Jewish background, is Anglo-white or Asian, and the child in question is older (i.e.teenager). An individual is more likely to take the side of the parent in a conflict if the respondent is older, less well-educated, has a Catholic or Protestant background, is black or Hispanic, and the child in question is younger (i.e. pre-teen, early teens).

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Knight, Seefeldt, and Sedlacek (1984) attempted a more general investigation into the attitudes of adults toward children under the age of 12. A Situational Attitude Scale-Adults/Children (SAS-A/C) was developed to assess whether attitudes toward children in social situations are positive, negative, or neutral. The SAS methodology was originally developed to measure the degree of prejudice one racial group holds toward another (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970). The methodology has been successfully applied to a number of different racial groups as well as to sex (Minatoya and Sedlacek, 1983), age (Peabody & Sedlacek, 1982), and disabled individuals (Stovall and Sedlacek, 1983). The methodology presents subjects with ten social situations or vignettes which reflect varying degrees of social distance and asks them to respond to ten bipolar pairs of adjectives for each situation. These adjectives reflect three dimensions: evaluative, potency, and activity. Half the subjects receive a version in which children are present in each of the ten social situations while the other half receive a version in which no mention of children is made. Research indicates that this procedure limits psychological withdrawal and makes it more difficult for subjects to respond on the basis of social desirability (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1972). The results of the Knight et al. (1984)

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study showed that in nine of the ten social situations, attitudes were significantly different when children were present. Situations representing close social proximity were most likely to be viewed as negative along the evaluative dimension. There were no significant sex differences.

The current study was conceived of as a substantive as well as a methodological inquiry into the attitudes of adults toward children. It is basically a replication and an extension of Knight et al (1984) and attempts to address several questions left unanswered by that study. First, is the SAS-A/C an appropriate tool for the study of attitudes toward children; are the results replicable? Second, can a shortened version of the SAS-A/C be utilized thus reducing the number of items from 100 to 50? Third, the Knight et al. study used a young adult population. Would the same results be found with a younger population? When do these attitudes toward children develop? And fourth, the Knight et al. study utilized only univariate analyses. A multivariate approach may be more appropriate for the complex data generated by the SAS-A/C. It was hypothesized that the results of this study would parallel and therefore reinforce the results of the previous research: situations including children would be viewed more negatively than

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situations in which no mention of children is made. A younger population was utilized and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed to reflect more accurately the multivariate nature of the data. This study also sought to investigate how attitudes toward children vary with the degree of social distance and whether or not there are any sex differences in attitudes toward children.

Method

Subjects.

Subjects for this study were 246 entering freshmen (43% male, 57% female, 7% black, 74% white, 5% Asian, 1% Hispanic) at a large eastern university. Due to missing data, not all subjects were included in all analyses. The modal age was 18 with only 2% of the subjects under the age of 17 and 1% over the age of 19. The majority of subjects (86%) had fathers in professional or semi-professional occupations; 77% also indicated that their mother was employed either full-time or part-time, the majority of these women (64%) in professional or semi-professional occupations. Twenty-nine percent identified themselves as Catholic, 31% as Jewish, 24% as Protestant, 8% as other, and 8% as none.

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Materials.

A shortened version of the Situational Attitude Scale-Adults/Children (SAS-AC) was utilized for this study. The SAS methodology was originally developed to measure the degree of prejudice one racial group holds toward another (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970). Development of the SAS-AC is described in detail in Knight, Seefeldt and Sedlacek (1984). Briefly, the instrument used in the present study consisted of five hypothetical situations representing previously measured levels of social distance. The five situations in order of increasing social-distance included: 1) having a person as a guest in my home for a week; 2) renting a room to someone in my home; 3) having a person live in the apartment next to mine; 4) having dinner in a nice restaurant with another person sitting nearby; and 5) sitting next to a person on an airplane flying non-stop from Washington, DC to San Francisco. Each situation was followed by ten bipolar scales representing the three dimensions of semantic meaning: evaluation, potency, and activity. The adjectives used for the biploar scales were suggested by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957). There were two forms of the SAS-AC. The control form did not designate the ages of any of the participants in the situation. In the experimental form, however, a child or

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children under the age of seven was included. Both forms consisted of identical instructions, social situations and bipolar scales. The instructions and situations are included in Exhibit 1.

Procedure

The two forms of the SAS-AC were randomly ordered and administered simultaneously on each occasion they were administered. Students were not aware there was more than one form of the scale. The administrator, an adult white female, read the directions to the group and was assisted by several student workers. Participation was voluntary and anonymous and all students present at the sessions on the selected days participated. Administration required less than 15 minutes.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed over the complete, 50-item SAS-AC questionnaire with sex (male vs. female) and form (children vs. no children) as the grouping variables. Results from this analysis were significant for form, $(50,157) = .532$, $p < .01$. Twenty-nine of the 50 univariate analyses performed on the data were also significant for form at the $p < .01$ level. (This is a larger number of significant analyses than would

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be expected by chance; Sakoda, Cohen, & Beall, 1954). The means and standard deviations for these analyses are presented in Table 1. In every case, situations involving children were viewed less positively than situations not specifically including children. Overall, there were no significant effects for sex ($\lambda(50,157) = .800$, $p > .01$) or for the interaction sex x form ($\lambda(50,157) = .716$, $p > .01$).

A separate two way MANOVA was run on each of the five situations contained within the SAS-AC questionnaire. As with the overall analysis, form was significant for each of the five situations at the $p < .01$ level. One of the situations also showed a significant main effect for sex ($p < .01$): males rated situation #1 more negatively than did females. There were no significant interactions.

Discussion

The results of this study show that subjects rated social situations more negatively when children under the age of seven were included in those situations. This result was consistent across all situations regardless of the social distance involved. It was also consistent across sex. The only sex difference found was that males rated one of the SAS situations more negatively overall (i.e., regardless of whether or not children were present). This

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situation (having dinner in a nice restaurant) was one of the most socially distant situations on the SAS. It is possible that females are socialized to be more comfortable with such superficial types of social contact and so rated these situations more favorably.

The SAS appears to be a useful tool in the study of attitudes toward children. Reducing the number of items from 100 to 50 appears to be an economical move both in terms of the amount of time necessary to complete the instrument and the number of subjects needed for statistical significance. Further reductions, howver, may not be possible without losing the benefit of including social situations of varying social distance. Although social distance did not appear to be related to the attitudes toward children in this study, it is still too early to eliminate this as a possible variable in future research.

Further exploration into the attitudes of adults toward children is needed at this point. At what age do these attitudes develop? Such attitudes are already formed by the time an individual reaches young adulthood as evidenced by this study and its predecessor (Knight et al, 1984). Replication of this study with a younger population would help answer this question. Does exposure have any effect on attitudes toward children? Few if any of the subjects in

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this study had children of their own or were exposed to children on a regular basis (the same was true in the Knight et al, 1984, study despite the older population). Repeating the study with a sample of parents would prove informative on this point. The Bohrnstedt et al (1981) study on the attitudes of adults toward children's autonomy found racial and religious differences. Such an analysis on the current data would prove useful in exploring some of the correlates of attitudes toward children. Finally, research investigating the relationship between attitudes and behavior toward children might prove very useful in understanding why society treats children as it does.

As we continue our study into the attitudes of adults toward children, it is important to keep in mind the broader social context. Even if we show that negative attitudes, prejudice and discrimination toward children exist, the analogy between children and other minority groups may necessarily be limited. As Bohrnstedt et al (1981) point out: "Other disenfranchised groups usually have the capacity and potential to compete equally with peers in the community. Both experience and scientific data indicate that mature judgement and the ability to make individual decisions and to participate fully in the social life of the community depend on age-related cognitive and social

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development" (p. 460). Child advocacy groups, including the Children's Defense Fund, acknowledge that children are not adults and are in many ways dependent on adults for care. By the same token, children often do not have the resources available to them to protect themselves from the arbitrary behavior of adults. It is for this reason that we need to be particularly aware of negative attitudes and behaviors directed toward children. If children are unable to protect themselves, then the burden lies with the rest of us.

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Table 1

Means*, Standard Deviations and Results of Analyses of Variance

ITEM NO.	SITUATIONS** BIPOLAR ADJECTIVE DIMENSIONS	MALE FORM A MEAN	MALE FORM A S.D.	MALE FORM B MEAN	MALE FORM B S.D.	FEMALE FORM A MEAN	FEMALE FORM A S.D.	FEMALE FORM B MEAN	FEMALE FORM B S.D.	DIFFERENCES SIGNIFICANT AT .001 ***
	I. NICE RESTAURANT									
1	friendly-unfriendly	1.67	,93	1.00	.78	1.24	.85	1.13	.79	F
2	passive-active	1.73	.96	1.64	1.06	1.87	1.01	1.69	.89	
3	tough-fragile	1.85	.74	1.70	.63	2.06	.83	2.05	.74	S
4	negative-positive	2.00	1.05	2.59	.84	2.35	1.03	2.84	.93	F
5	short-long	1.81	.87	2.07	.76	1.96	.89	2.03	.64	
6	deliberate-impulsive	1.77	1.04	1.95	1.10	2.26	.91	2.11	.82	
7	superior-inferior	1.33	.78	1.77	.89	1.48	.86	1.78	.86	F
8	weak-strong	2.65	.93	2.57	.79	2.50	.82	2.44	.83	
9	intentional-unintentional	2.00	.97	1.77	1.10	1.89	1.04	1.94	.89	
10	comfortable-uncomfortable	1.94	1.24	1.05	1.08	1.39	1.27	1.20	1.10	F
	II. APARTMENT NEXT DOOR									
11.	fast-slow	1.79	.74	1.36	.97	1.72	.90	1.55	.87	F
12.	humorous-serious	1.63	1.10	1.20	.90	1.48	.93	1.38	.85	
13.	willing-unwilling	1.60	1.09	.84	.91	1.28	1.09	1.00	.85	F
14.	bad-good	2.27	.89	2.91	.91	2.46	1.04	2.89	.91	F
15.	strong-weak	1.52	.97	1.30	.85	1.46	.82	1.44	.73	
16.	active-passive	1.56	1.09	1.23	.89	1.39	.96	1.09	.83	F
17.	friendly-unfriendly	1.06	.86	.43	.59	1.06	1.16	.50	.71	F
18.	small-largw	2.27	1.00	2.32	.80	2.04	.91	2.20	.78	
19.	hot-cold	1.88	.82	1.45	.82	1.76	.75	1.61	.70	F
20.	unsociable-sociable	2.60	1.16	3.27	.90	3.07	1.15	3.33	.86	F

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* Scale A to E, (Numerical equivalent 1 to 4)

** See exhibit 1 for complete situations

*** Results of 2-way analysis of variance (fixed effects) with F (Form A or B) and S (Sex, male or female) as main effects, and SxF as the interaction.

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Table 1 (continued)

Means*, Standard Deviations and Results of Analyses of Variance

ITEM NO.	SITUATIONS ** BIPOLAR ADJECTIVE DIMENSIONS	MALE FORM A MEAN	MALE FORM A S.D.	MALE FORM B MEAN	MALE FORM B S.D.	FEMALE FORM A MEAN	FEMALE FORM A S.D.	FEMALE FORM B MEAN	FEMALE FORM B S.D.	DIFFERENCES SIGNIFICANT AT .001 ***
	III. ROOM TO RENT									
21.	willing-unwilling	2.04	1.38	.89	.89	2.13	1.39	1.14	.99	F
22.	slow-fast	2.12	.94	2.20	.79	2.18	.97	2.00	.85	
23.	weak-strong	2.60	.84	2.86	.73	2.52	.99	2.73	.95	
24.	serious-humorous	1.67	1.08	1.98	1.13	1.85	1.20	1.86	1.22	
25.	disapproving-approving	1.85	1.20	2.25	.94	2.02	1.21	2.38	.83	F
26.	friendly-unfriendly	1.33	1.02	.70	.82	.64	.72	1.11	.96	F
27.	intentional-unintentional	1.54	.82	1.18	.79	1.52	1.00	1.28	.98	F
28.	small-large	1.98	.88	2.34	.95	2.40	.94	2.27	.82	
29.	active-passive	1.52	.97	.95	.83	1.39	1.05	.92	.98	F
30.	comfortable-uncomfortable	1.80	1.32	1.27	1.03	2.02	1.14	1.32	.91	F
	IV. SEAT ON AIRPLANE									
31.	pleasurable - painful	1.61	1.09	1.14	1.05	2.27	1.12	1.25	1.01	F, S
32.	simple-complex	2.00	1.01	1.89	1.09	2.23	.93	1.80	.95	
33.	humorous-serious	1.35	1.03	1.42	1.02	1.77	1.11	1.41	.84	
34.	bad-good	2.43	1.02	2.73	1.06	1.88	1.04	2.68	.93	F
35.	short-long	1.98	.90	2.16	.86	2.19	.79	2.16	.81	
36.	heavy-light	2.00	1.03	2.20	.99	2.02	.91	2.45	.76	F
37.	intentional-unintentional	2.00	1.06	1.69	1.02	1.77	.99	1.98	1.23	
38.	unwilling-willing	2.33	1.13	2.66	.91	2.02	1.10	2.70	.90	F
39.	sociable-unsociable	1.30	1.22	.95	.97	1.60	1.23	1.00	.89	F
40.	active-passive	1.50	1.08	1.50	1.08	1.88	1.06	1.41	.90	

* Scale A to E (numerical equivalent, 1-4)

** See Exhibit 1 for complete situations

*** Results of 2-way analysis of variance (fixed effects), with F (Form A or B) and S (Sex: male or female), as main effects, and SxF as the interaction.

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Table 1 (continued)

Means*, Standard Deviations and Results of Analyses of Variance

ITEM NO.	SITUATIONS** BIPOLAR ADJECTIVE DIMENSIONS	MALE				FEMALE				DIFFERENCES SIGNIFICANT AT .001 ***
		FORM A MEAN	S.D.	FORM B MEAN	S.D.	FORM A MEAN	S.D.	FORM B MEAN	S.D.	
	V. HOUSEGUESTS									
41.	approving-disapproving	1.63	1.30	.72	.95	2.00	1.15	.73	1.11	F
42.	small-large	2.13	1.06	2.50	.98	2.44	.92	2.41	.97	
43.	unwilling-willing	2.24	1.31	3.05	1.06	2.06	1.06	3.23	.86	F
44.	weak-strong	2.63	.98	2.77	.81	2.40	1.00	2.68	.83	
45.	intentional-unintentional	1.57	1.02	1.34	1.07	1.79	.80	1.52	1.15	
46.	friendly-unfriendly	1.15	1.19	.45	.78	1.23	1.04	.50	.95	F
47.	slow-fast	2.20	1.02	2.58	.87	2.31	.75	2.48	1.00	F
48.	humorous-serious	1.41	1.24	1.14	.92	1.63	.96	1.09	1.05	F
49.	uncomfortable-comfortable	2.22	1.33	3.02	1.00	1.92	1.05	3.18	.99	F
50.	active-passive	1.26	1.08	.80	.96	1.67	1.00	1.05	1.12	F

* Scale A to E, (numerical equivalaent 0 - 4)

** See Exhibit 1 for complete situations

*** Results of 2-way analysis of variance (fixed effects), with F (Form A and B) and S (Sex, male or female) as main effects, and SxF as the interaction.

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